

Speaker Note: Distribute packet of handouts before the presentation begins. You may want to introduce yourself as part of the welcome and introductions.

- First, I'd like to welcome you all to this presentation about talking with your doctor. Today, we'll learn about how you can take an interactive role in your health care. Please note that I am not a doctor and do not have the medical expertise to address individual health concerns or provide medical advice. Our presentation will instead focus on communication tips for getting the most out of your doctor's appointment. Also, while I will use the word "doctor" to describe the health professional, this person could also be a nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or other type of clinician. The presentation will take about 45 minutes with a couple breaks for short activities.
- Before I get started, I wanted to point out that I have distributed a packet of information to help you recall some of the most important points we will discuss today. Throughout the presentation, I'll refer back to specific handouts in this packet. The handouts are yours to keep.
- The information in this presentation comes from the National Institute on Aging, a Federal agency that is part of the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Health and Human Services. You can visit www.nia.nih.gov for more information on this topic.

Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (2 minutes) Ask group the following question to help them begin actively thinking about the doctor-patient relationship.

- What are some words to describe a good doctor-patient relationship?

Speaker Note: If the audience doesn't call out words, you might try providing a few examples, such as open communication, patience, partnership, honesty, etc.

You're an official partner in your healthcare team



In this role, you will be expected to:

- Ask questions
- Speak up



- In the past, the patient-doctor relationship was one-directional—the doctor typically took the lead and the patient followed. Today, a good patient-doctor relationship is a partnership.
- As an active member of your healthcare team, you should:
- **(Click) ASK QUESTIONS!**
 - If you don't understand something, ask your doctor to explain it again.
 - Your doctor may use technical terms and not realize they are unfamiliar or confusing to you unless you say something.
- **(Click) SPEAK UP!**
 - Tell your doctor if something is bothering you, such as a pain in your hip or other symptoms. Don't just wait to see if it goes away.
 - Or, let your doctor know if you're unsure about that surgery and want to hear about other treatment options.
- Taking an active role in your care puts the responsibility for good communication on both you and your doctor.

Easier Said Than Done?

Today, we'll talk about how to:

- Get ready for an appointment
- Share information
- Make decisions with your doctor



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- Today, we'll help make it easier to ask questions and speak up by talking about how to:
 - **(Click)** Get ready for an appointment
 - **(Click)** Share information
 - **(Click)** Make decisions with your doctor
- Don't worry about remembering every detail; the information from this presentation can be found in your packet.
- And, we'll have plenty of time for questions.

Activity: What Did You Eat Yesterday?



List everything you ate and drank yesterday, including approximate portion size.

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Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (3 minutes) To show how hard it can be to remember every detail and why it's important to write down information/questions before a doctor's appointment.

- Pair up with someone next to you, and take turns sharing everything you ate and drank yesterday, including about how much of each item. After this activity, I'll explain how this relates to talking with your doctor.

Speaker Note: Discussion after activity.

- How easy was it to remember everything? Did you realize that you forgot at least one thing while sharing with your partner? Maybe a piece of candy or the glass of water you drank with your pills?
- It can be hard to remember every detail like that. It's the same at the doctor's office, when you have to remember:
 - Every health issue you've had since your last visit
 - Concerns you want to discuss
 - What medications you take and their dosages
 - What over-the-counter drugs, vitamins, and supplements you use
- You might feel under pressure to fit everything in during the short time you have with the doctor. It's easy to see how you might overlook something important.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Getting Ready for a Doctor's Visit."

Getting Ready for an Appointment

Before you go to the doctor:

- Create a plan
 - List and prioritize your concerns
 - Note other health and life changes since your last visit



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- There are things you can do to prepare for an appointment so that you have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish and don't forget something important. Most of the tips we'll talk about are for regularly scheduled doctor's appointments rather than for emergency visits.
- **(Click)** Start by listing everything you want to discuss. If you have a new symptom or problem, make notes about:
 - How long the symptom lasts
 - What makes it better or worse
 - How it affects your daily activities
- If possible, start this list at least a week before the appointment, so you have time to add issues you may have forgotten at first.
- Prioritize your list of concerns, and highlight the 3 to 4 most important to discuss first, so that you don't run out of time to bring them up.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Concerns to Discuss."

- **(Click)** Make note of other health and life changes since your last visit, such as:
 - New illnesses, operations, and medical conditions
 - Emergency room or specialist visits
 - Changes in appetite, weight, sleep, or energy level
 - Changes in medications or reactions to medications
 - A recent loss or a move

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Changes to Discuss."

- You can also ask your doctor's office for the medical history form before your visit so that you have extra time to fill out the new information.



Getting Ready for an Appointment

- Gather information to take with you
 - Other doctors' contact information
 - Insurance cards
 - Medical history
 - Medicine (prescriptions, over-the-counter pills, vitamins, supplements, eye drops)



- Take the following information with you to the visit:
 - **(Click)** Names and phone numbers of any other doctors you see, even if you don't see them regularly
 - **(Click)** Your insurance cards
 - **(Click)** If this is your first visit with a new doctor, bring medical records and additional files, charts, test results, or other information from your former doctor. Or, have your new doctor's office contact your former doctor's office to get copies of your medical records. You'll need your old doctor's name and address.
 - **(Click)** Bring a complete list of what you take, along with dose information. Or, put all your pills, drops, vitamins, and herbal remedies or other supplements in a bag and bring them with you; but, be careful not to misplace the bag.
- It's possible for medicines to interact, sometimes causing dangerous side effects. That's why your doctor needs to know about ALL the medicines you take, including:
 - Medicines prescribed by other doctors
 - Things you buy without a prescription, like headache medicine, eye drops, vitamins, laxatives, herbal remedies, and other supplements
- If you experience side effects, do not stop taking your medication without first talking to your doctor.

Speaker Note: Refer to "Keeping Track of Your Medications" chart.

Getting Ready for an Appointment

- Think about what you'll need to see, hear, and communicate during your visit:



- Wear your glasses and your hearing aids
- Consider bringing a family member or friend
- Ask your doctor for an interpreter, if you need one

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- So, part of your preparation for a doctor's visit is pulling together your list.
- Another part is thinking about potential obstacles to communicating with your doctor.
- **(Click)** Wear your glasses and hearing aids, and let your doctor know if you have a hard time seeing or hearing. For instance, you can ask your doctor to speak slowly.
- **(Click)** Consider bringing a family member or friend.
 - If you do, bring a person who can take notes and help you remember what the doctor tells you.
 - Make sure this person does not take too strong a role during the visit. You may even want some private time with your doctor to discuss something personal.
- **(Click)** Ask your doctor for an interpreter, if you need one.
 - If possible, explain your concerns to the interpreter before your appointment so he or she can fully understand your situation before telling the doctor.
- Any questions so far?

Speaker Note: Allow a few minutes for questions. If more than 5 minutes of questions, you might suggest that you continue with the presentation to make sure you have time to go through everything and suggest that the group return to the questions at the end.

Set Your Plan Into Action!

Sharing information
with your doctor
during the visit



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- You've prepared for your appointment by:
 - Making a list of your concerns in order of their importance to you
 - Writing down your medications
 - Noting all of the changes in your health since your last visit
 - Wearing your glasses and hearing aids as needed
 - Maybe even practicing what you want to discuss with your doctor
- Now you are ready to set your plan into action.
- First, let's do another quick activity.

Activity: Describe the Image

- What do you think is going on in this photo?
- What could this woman be feeling? What might be her symptoms?



Speaker Note: ACTIVITY (1 minute) To help the group understand the importance of being clear and specific when describing health concerns and symptoms.

- Look at this picture.
 - If you had to guess, why do you think this woman is at the doctor's office?
 - What do you think this woman is feeling? What might be her symptoms?
- Feel free to call out your responses.

Speaker Note: Discussion after activity.

- Did you find that you had different ways to describe the same picture? This is a lot like sharing the symptoms of a potential health problem with your doctor. Health issues, like back pain or fatigue, can have different meanings to different people.
- By giving clear descriptions of your symptoms, you're helping your doctor figure out the root of the problem.

Sharing Information with Your Doctor



Start with your symptoms

- What are they?
- When did they start?
- How often do you have them? All the time or sometimes?
- What makes them better or worse?
- How do they affect your daily life?

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- When sharing information with your doctor, start from the top of your prioritized list of health concerns.
- Describe your symptoms in a clear and concise way to help your doctor diagnose the problem and decide what to do next.
- Examples might include pain, fever, lump or bump, unexplained weight loss or gain, feeling depressed or sad all the time, problems sleeping, or diarrhea.
- Share with your doctor:
 - **(Click)** What the symptoms are
 - **(Click)** When they started
 - **(Click)** How often you have them
 - **(Click)** What makes them better or worse
 - **(Click)** How they affect your daily life
- Don't assume your symptoms—like pain or fatigue—are just a normal part of aging. The doctor needs to know how you feel.

Sharing Information with Your Doctor

- Go over your medications
- Tell the doctor about your habits
- Voice other concerns



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After discussing your symptoms,

- Go over your medications using the list you created or bag of medications you put together before your appointment.
- Let your doctor know if you've had any drug allergies or reactions. For example, did any medicine make you feel light-headed, interrupt your sleep, or cause constipation?
- Make sure the doctor's office has the contact information for your pharmacy so that they can call in prescriptions. Try to use the same pharmacy for all your medicines prescribed by different doctors. The pharmacy tracks all of this information and can notify you about possibly dangerous drug interactions.
- **(Click)** To provide the best care, your doctor must understand you as a person and know what your life is like. Your doctor may ask you questions about:
 - What you eat/drink
 - How you sleep
 - What activities you do
 - If you smoke or drink
- Think of your doctor's office as a safe place to share information. It's best to tell your doctor the whole truth. Knowing your habits will help your doctor to understand your medical conditions fully and recommend the best treatment choices for you.
- **(Click)** Share any other concerns. For instance, tell your doctor about any major changes or emotional stress in your life, like a move or a recent loss.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Making Good Use of Your Time During a Doctor's Visit."

Doctor-Patient Communication is a Dialogue

-  : You share your health concerns
-  : Your doctor asks questions about your symptoms
-  : You answer the questions
-  : Your doctor shares the diagnosis and treatment
-  : You ask questions to better understand the plan
-  : Your doctor answers the questions

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- You'll GIVE your doctor a lot of information during your visit, but you'll also GET a lot of information. Asking questions about this information is very important.
- Here's how a conversation with your doctor might go. (*Click through slide.*)
- Pay close attention to the last 2 items on this list.
 - The conversation doesn't end after the diagnosis and treatment plan.
 - Ask questions about the diagnosis, any words you don't understand, or instructions that are unclear.
- For example, if a doctor says something about an acute myocardial (my·oh·kar·dee·al) infarction (in·fark·shen), what would he or she mean? (*Pause for response.*)
 - **Answer:** It's a technical term for a heart attack.
- What about if your doctor tells you to take medicine with food? Does that mean before, during, or after a meal? (*Pause for response.*)
 - **Answer:** It depends, which is why it's important to ask plenty of questions!
- Next we'll talk about questions to ask your doctor.

Speaker Note: Refer to handout "Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment."

Questions To Ask About Medical Tests

- What will the test tell us?
- What does it involve?
- How should I get ready?
- Are there any dangers or side effects?



- Let's start with questions about medical tests.
- Sometimes doctors do blood tests, x-rays, or other procedures to find out what's wrong or to learn more about your medical condition.
- Some tests are done regularly to check for hidden medical problems, even if you don't have any symptoms.
- Before having a medical test, ask your doctor to explain why it is important, what it will show, and if insurance will cover the cost. If insurance isn't going to pay for it, you can ask who to talk to about the out-of-pocket cost.
- Some questions to ask your doctor before the test are:
 - What will the test tell us?
 - **(Click)** What does it involve?
 - **(Click)** How should I get ready?
 - **(Click)** Are there any dangers or side effects?
- Find out how and when you will get the results. Arrange with your doctor to have the results of the test explained to you, allowing time for questions. If the test is done by a specialist, have the results sent to your primary doctor.

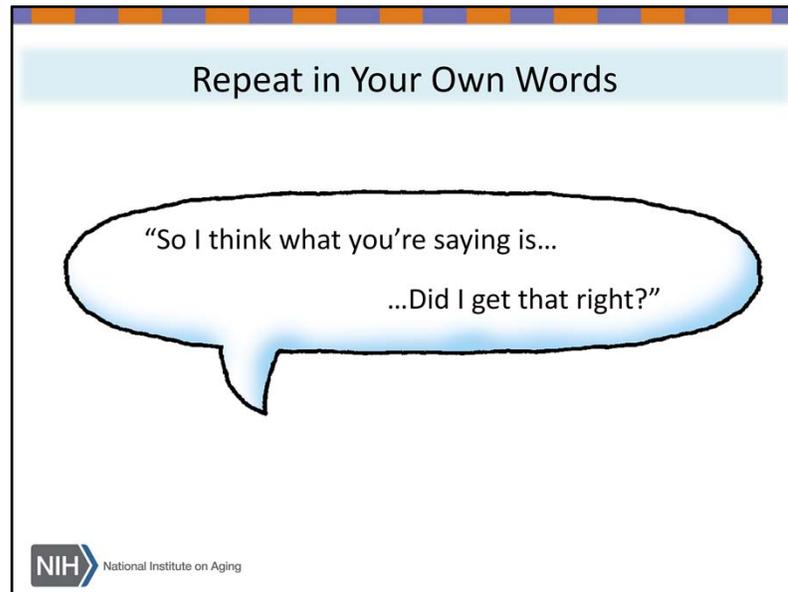
Questions To Ask About Your Diagnosis



- What may have caused this condition?
- How long will it last? Is it permanent?
- How is this condition treated or managed?
- How will it affect me?



- Next, let's consider questions about your diagnosis.
- A diagnosis is what your doctor determines to be your health problem. It's based on your symptoms and the results of your physical exam and other medical tests.
- After the doctor gives you a diagnosis, here are some questions to ask:
 - Why do you think I have this diagnosis? What may have caused it?
 - **(Click)** How long will it last? Is it permanent?
 - **(Click)** How is it treated or managed?
 - **(Click)** How will it affect me?
- Make sure you really understand your diagnosis and its implications. If you don't, have your doctor explain it again.
- Ignoring the diagnosis will not make it go away. Understanding your condition will help you make better decisions about treatment, and knowing what to expect may make it easier to deal with the condition.
- Have the doctor write down the name of the condition and any other relevant information for you. That way, you can refer to it later or share it with others. Ask your doctor if he or she can recommend any resources to learn more about your condition.



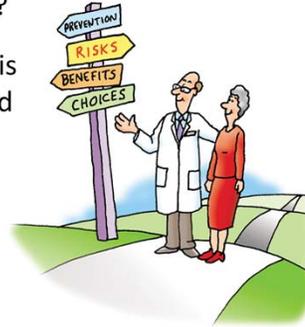
- Have you ever noticed that when you tell your doctor something, he or she repeats it back to you to make sure he or she understood everything correctly?
- That's a great opportunity for you to correct your doctor if he or she has gotten something wrong.
- You can do the same thing when getting information from your doctor. After your doctor tells you something, like your diagnosis or treatment plan, repeat it back in your own words. Do you think that might be helpful?

Speaker Note: Allow 30 seconds for response.

- We just have a few more slides left.

Questions To Ask About Treatment Options

- What are my treatment choices?
- What are the risks and benefits?
- Ask yourself—which treatment is best for me, given my values and circumstances?



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- Sharing and receiving information are two important steps in doctor-patient communication. A third is to make decisions about your care together.
- Talk about treatment options.
- Ask your doctor about all of the ways to treat your health problem. There may be more than one.
- **(Click)** Discuss the risks and benefits of each one. This includes possible side effects, that is, unwanted or unexpected symptoms of the treatment.
- Also ask about:
 - How likely a treatment might work for you and what exactly it will do
 - Length of treatment and if you will need help from family or friends
 - Whether insurance will pay for the treatment
- Have your doctor give you directions in writing.
- **(Click)** Think about how each treatment will affect your life and ability to do activities you enjoy. Share your concerns, so your doctor can work with you to develop a treatment plan that meets your needs.
- If a treatment makes you uncomfortable, ask if something else might work.
- If your treatment involves getting a prescription, make sure to know what to expect. You can find more specific questions about medications in the handout ***“Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment.”***

Maintaining the Doctor-Patient Partnership

Closing thoughts:

1. Prepare for your appointment by writing down a list of your concerns.
2. Share any changes in your medical history and a complete list of your medicines.
3. Make sure you understand what the doctor is telling you.
4. Take notes or ask the doctor to write down information to help you remember.



- Remember that a successful doctor-patient relationship is a partnership.
- To recap some highlights from our presentation today, as an active member of your healthcare team:
 1. Prepare for your appointment by writing down a list of your concerns.
 2. **(Click)** Share any changes in your medical history and a complete list of your medicines.
 3. **(Click)** Make sure you understand what the doctor is telling you.
 4. **(Click)** Take notes or ask the doctor to write down information to help you remember.

Speaker Note: Refer to remaining handouts in the packet—“Remembering What the Doctor Says” and “Health and Aging Information Resources”—which contain more helpful information. There are also questions about prevention in the “Questions to Ask During a Medical Appointment” handout.

- This brings me to the end of the presentation.

Speaker Note: Ask a few questions to generate discussion and highlight some major points from the presentation:

- Did you find anything particularly helpful?
- Any tips you plan to try during your next appointment?
- Anything surprising or something you hadn't thought about before?
- Does anyone have questions about talking with your doctor?

Speaker Note: If questions remained from earlier in the talk, you might want to reengage those people, asking them to share their question(s).

For More Information

Want more free information about health and aging?

Contact:

 National Institute on Aging

www.nia.nih.gov
1-800-222-2225

Talking with Your Doctor:
Taking an interactive role in your health care
May 2014

- For additional information on *Talking with Your Doctor* and other free resources from the National Institute on Aging:
 - Visit the website www.nia.nih.gov and click “Publications” on the top of the screen.
 - There you can download or print your own copy of the *Talking with Your Doctor* booklet.
 - You can also find a variety of other information on health and wellness, including materials about exercise and physical activity, making healthy food choices, quitting smoking, and other behaviors that can help you feel better and prevent or manage specific medical conditions.
 - Or, if you don’t want to go online, you can call the National Institute on Aging Information Center toll-free at 1-800-222-2225 to speak to an Information Specialist.